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ABSTRACT

Developments in technology, in organizational structure, and in higher education are placing increasing demands on library managers. The library director, once primarily concerned with finances, and the management of collection, staff, and facilities, must increasingly be concerned with the articulation of values. The formulation and promulgation of a value system is essential to organizational success. (Author)

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by

Mary Ann Griffin

Abstract: Developments in technology, in organizational structure, and in higher education are placing increasing demands on libray managers. The library director, once primarily concerned with finances, and the management of collection, staff, and facilities, must increasingly be concerned with the articulation of values. The formulation and promulgation of a value system is essential to organizational success.

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

"Managing Values in an Academic Library"

Books such as In Search of Excellence, Making America Work, Change Masters and others seek to convince their readers of the importance of an accepted value system to effective organizational performance. They repeatedly stress the necessity of values management within an organization. While values management is not a new concept in the literature of management generally, it is not one which has received much attention in library literature. What do we know about the management of values in academic libraries?

As organizations, libraries seek to fulfill certain purposes and goals. Because academic libraries are departments of a larger organizational unit, the college or university, and not entities unto themselves, the academic library functions within that larger setting. Higher education is a value-laden process. The tradition of academic life is the "search for truth." Fairness, intellectual inquiry, tolerance of ideas, respect for the facts, dissemination of knowledge are all values that are readily associated with the higher education community. However, higher education is not reputed to be an area exhibiting great management expertise. In the opening pages of their book on the American College President entitled, Leadership and Ambiguity, Michael Cohen and James March describe colleges and universities as having problematic goals, unclear technology and fluid participation.[1] A brief explanation of these terms is useful for the consideration of values management. An organization suffers from problematic goals when it bases its operation on a variety of ill-defined and often inconsistent preferences. Unclear technology implies that the organization often uses procedures resulting from accidents of past experience or from imitation of what other institutions are doing. Fluid participation describes the situation where the amount of time and effort that individuals give to the organization is not consistent. (An example is the faculty member who works within the

context of a profession more than within the context of a specific institution.) Cohen and March summarize the higher education realm with the phrase "organized anarchy." Being more generous, some researchers of management consciously use the term "environment" rather than "organization" when describing colleges and universities. Whatever the shortcomings or benefits, higher education is the setting in which academic libraries operate. As a component of this larger functioning unit, the academic library should work toward fulfilling specific educational goals and institutional purposes, and in so doing reflect organizational values.

Librarians seek to organize and make available for use thousands or even millions of items. They purchase items that they feel have potential for use, they categorize them and add them to the collection, they help users find what they need among the vast stores of information and they try to retrieve items that have not been returned after they have been borrowed from the premises. How do these activities reflect organizational values? If fundamental objectives are the selection, acquisition, cataloging, lending and retrieval of items, how is the library really different from Joe's local rent-a-tool operation?

The purposes of most academic libraries are similar. They might be described in the following way:

- building a collection of information for present and future use
- providing access to information
- serving as consultant in the use of information resources
- instructing in the process of information retrieval.

These purposes could be summarized with the phrase "facilitating the information

to knowledge process." This summary statement reflects the instructional mode of higher education.

In his recent book, The Management of Values,[2] Charles McCoy states that an organization reflects its values through the goals it sets for itself. This rather simplistic sounding statement contains the implication that a value system drives the formulation of policies, goals, and practices. Most people would readily agree with the advisability of such a situation. The reality is that all too often the formulation of policy results from reaction to immediate pressures. Referring again to the higher education environment, one sometimes senses that institutional policy formulation could more accurately be described as aiming at an erratically moving target. While the academic realm is replete with values, institutions have often not used their values to effectively guide their practices. It's been my experience that libraries are frequently acknowledged to be among the best managed operations on campuses. Given the managerial reputation of academe perhaps this is not a significant feat. Although the profit and not-for-profit sectors are driven by different motivations, it is not surprising that library administrators look to the realm of business to extract practices that might have successful application in their own setting.

The popular book, In Search of Excellence, discusses the values of excellent companies.[3] The authors tell us that:

1) The values are usually stated in qualitative rather than quantitative terms,
2) Financial or strategic objectives are never an end in themselves, but are related to whatever else the company expects to do well,
3) Values are meant to inspire everyone in the firm,

4) Values are often identified through the juxtaposition of certain factors; e.g. cost versus service, operation versus innovation, formality versus informality, control orientation versus people orientation.

Peters and Watermann also list values that are dominant in excellent companies:

- belief in being the best
- belief in the importance of the individual
- belief in superior quality and service
- belief in the importance of informality to enhance communication
- belief in the importance of details in doing a job well
- belief that most members of the organization should be innovators
- recognition of the importance of growth and profit.

Again and again, one reads in management literature that managing the values of an organization is at the core of effective leadership. Tom Watson, Jr. of IBM, one of the "excellent companies," stated almost thirty years ago: I firmly believe that any organization, in order to survive and achieve success, must have a sound set of beliefs on which it premises all its policies and actions. Next, I believe that the most important single factor in corporate success is faithful adherence to those beliefs. And finally, I believe that if an organization is to meet the challenges of a changing world, it must be prepared to change everything about itself except those beliefs as it moves through corporate life.[4]

What can be said about the values or beliefs of academic libraries? In particular, what are the organizational values of your library? It is likely

that many of us can not readily answer that question. If that is the case, it indicates that explicit values are not pervasive in the library organization. Some would say that's not important since most librarians have a sense of what library values would be. But that response is subject to the same problems as the following statement: Don't ask me to define real art, I know it when I see it.

Each person who works in an organization brings an individual set of values to the workplace. Values provide guidelines to interpret the significance to an individual of certain happenings. Everything a person does is based on values, that are either consciously or unconsciously held. Unless organizational values are promulgated and accepted by employees as worthy, values held by individuals become the ones that are exhibited in the workplace. This may mean the lack of consistent application of values within the organization. It may mean a department or division orientation rather than a library orientation. It may mean organizational drift, whereby decisions are made in response to pressures rather than by taking commonly held beliefs into account. It may mean excessive agonizing in decisionmaking at all levels, or frequent questioning of decisions.

Prevalent values of excellent companies have been noted. What might be some examples of values of an academic library? Undoubtedly, these would vary somewhat from one library to another. Some values might be:

- equal access to information
- providing a balanced collection
- superior assistance to users
- the importance of each staff member to the organization
- the importance of scholarly endeavors

Most of us could readily accept these values. Other more controversial ones might include:

- information without charge
- the importance of access to information rather than collection building
- the importance of the librarian rather than the collection as the source of information
- the librarian as teacher rather than information provider
- the importance of an informal atmosphere to library effectiveness.

When values of an organization are not readily evident, the logical question that follows is: How can the values of a library organization best be determined? One response to this question might be that those in top levels of management know the important values. That may well be true. However, unless these values are then successfully transmitted to all employees of the organization, the values are not organizational values. The values may be informing policy at top levels, but what is happening with the translation of policy into action further down the line?

Managing values within an organization presupposes that a manager can identify and promote the criteria (or values) by which policy will be formulated. If the exact nature of the values is not known, values clarification techniques exist that can be used to identify most strongly held values. The values clarification process involves a logical analysis whose results specify values that are freely chosen after carefully considering alternative values. The values must become positively accepted, publicly affirmed and acted upon repeatedly to have validity as a values system.[5] Sociologist Philip Selznick tells us:

> Truly accepted values must infuse the organization at many

levels, affecting the perspectives and attitudes of personnel, the relative importance of staff activities, the distribution of authority, relations with outside groups, and many other matters."[6]

"Structured Chaos" is a phrase used by Peters and Waterman to describe one of the hallmarks of excellent companies. While it may seem that "chaos" might better describe the situation in some academic libraries, "structured chaos" is the aim of those striving for excellence. In this kind of environment, a sense of individual responsibility, an action orientation and the ability to deal with ambiguity are important characteristics along with genuine acceptance of specified organizational values.

Let's consider what might be some specific outcomes of values management:

(1) staff members become more conscious of the values that they and the organization have in common (or at odds)

(2) motivation is greater when employees are aware of value priorities of the organization

(3) common organizational values allow an effective work environment even when cultural values may be in conflict

(4) interpersonal conflicts can be made more objective when there are expected value norms for the organization

(5) encouragement of innovation has less problematic results when there are commonly held values

(6) managers can become more aware of the degree of correspondence between organizational values and the values of the constituency served.

It is becoming increasingly crucial for library managers to set priorities and make choices. They are being faced with a variety of pressures including:

- technological developments and accompanying technical problems
- an expanding range of organizational activities
- employees who seek involvement and participation but who also bring more specialized skills and thus more autonomy to their work environment
- increasingly decentralized decisionmaking
- greater complexities in relationships such as those arising from library cooperatives or funding agencies.

The real difference between organizational success and failure is no doubt determined by the degree to which the library utilizes the energies and talents of its people. But, as much as we need them, good people are not enough in this time of transition. Library management must help staff members find common cause with each other. This is done by nurturing an overall perspective rather than by just maintaining organizational equilibrium, and by deepening the consensus about beliefs and commitments. This means that staff members are well aware that they are part of one organization and contribute to shared goals. The inner cohesion produces a coordination of activity that can surpass in significance that which can be achieved through organizational hierarchies or policies and regulations.

Human resource management, financial management, collection management, and facilities management have all received substantial and ongoing treatment in the library realm. It is time that values management also receives due recognition and is consciously practiced.

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